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## ABSTRACT

In classrooms across America, academic standards are being raised. This brochure is intended to help parents understand the importance of higher academic standards and to provide questions that parents can ask teachers and administrators to learn what they need to know about the expectations at their children's school. The brochure first defines higher standards and highlights how children can become "academically fit" for the future. A sampling of academic work from schools where high standards are already in place is then presented for 2nd grade writing and English, 4th grade reading, 7th grade math, 8th grade history, high school science, high school English, 8th grade math, and 8th grade science. The brochure then offers suggestions for creating a regular dialogue with the child's teacher, and presents questions to ask in five areas: (1) "What skills and knowledge will my child be expected to master this year?"; (2) "How will my child be evaluated?"; (3) "What can I do to stay more involved in my child's academic progress?"; (4) "How do you accommodate differences in learning?"; and (5) "How are students prepared for further learning after high school?" Additional questions to ask if the child is in high school are included. The brochure concludes with suggested activities to reinforce learning at home in the areas of reading/writing, math, social studies, science, and the arts. A list of sources on academic standards is included. (HTH)

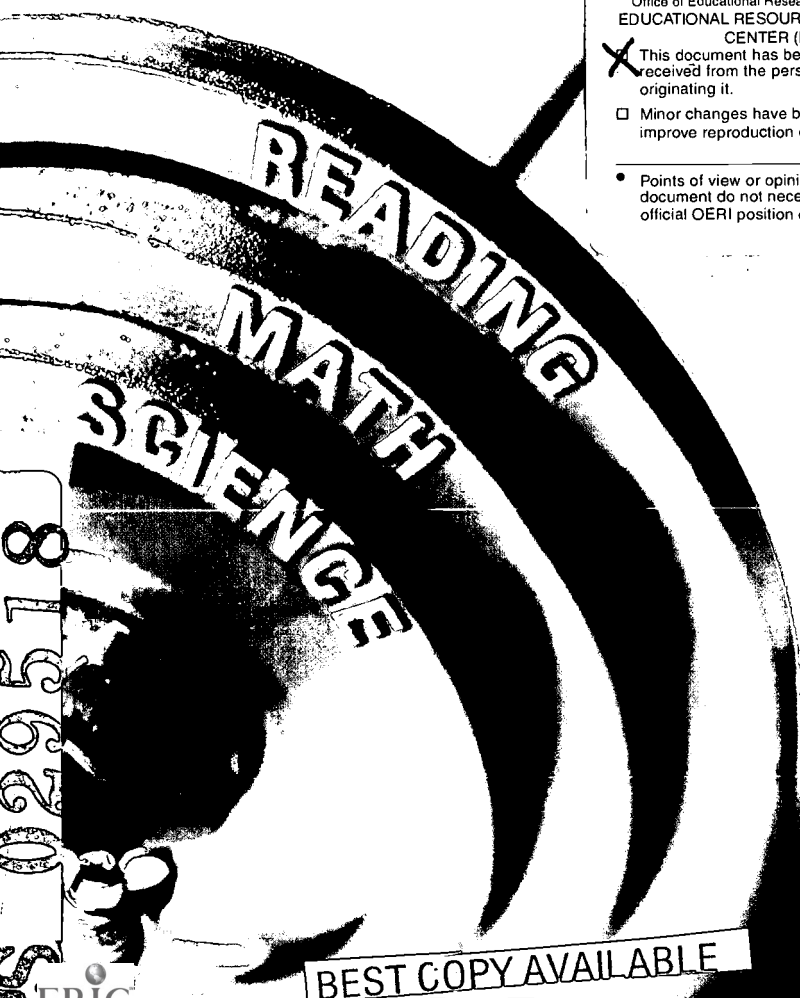
# Strengthening your child's academic future

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Pumped. Motivated.  
And ready to succeed!

This brochure is designed to:

- help you understand the importance of higher academic standards; and
- provide you with sample questions you can ask teachers and administrators to find out what you need to know about the academic expectations in your child's school.



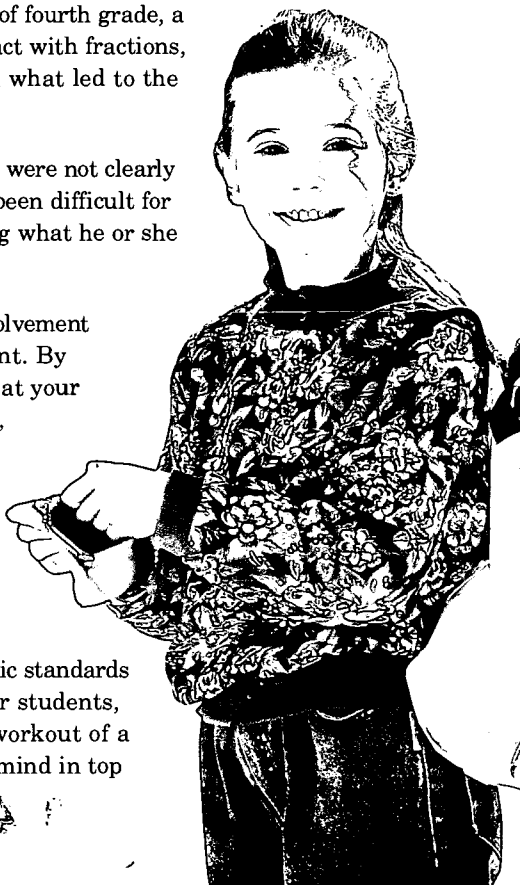
It's the dream of every parent:  
a bright and healthy child. It's the hope  
for every student: a good, solid education.  
And making sure that your child's school  
has challenging academic standards is  
one of the best ways to get him or her in  
academic shape for the future.

*What are academic standards?* Academic standards define the basic skills that your child should have, and the things he or she should know in each subject, at each grade level. *Raising academic standards* will help your child succeed in today's increasingly competitive world. For instance, in a school system that has clearly defined academic standards, parents, students and teachers would know that by the end of fourth grade, a student is expected to add and subtract with fractions, give accurate directions and explain what led to the founding of the American Colonies.

Often in the past, academic standards were not clearly defined. So as a parent, it may have been difficult for you to know if your child was learning what he or she needed to know in each subject.

Today, more than ever, your active involvement in your child's education is important. By making sure the academic standards at your child's school are challenging enough, you help better prepare your child for an academically fit future. If you find academic standards are not clearly defined or are too low, urge your state or school district to better define or to raise them.

In classrooms across America, academic standards are being raised. This means that for students, parents and teachers, the greatest workout of a lifetime has begun: getting a child's mind in top  
ic shape.



Meeting higher academic standards  
will give your child's mind  
a real workout.

Higher academic standards will get your child's mind in shape for the future. Unlike ten or fifteen years ago, we now live in a world of computers, Web sites and international competition. In a number of other countries and American communities, academics are more rigorous and challenging, and their students graduate better prepared to compete in our increasingly complex world. In order for your child to succeed in school, at work and in the community, he or she will need more skills and knowledge than ever before.

*Higher academic standards get results.* Organized around key subjects such as English, math, history, science, civics, arts and geography, academic standards will let you and your child know what is expected of him or her up front.

But remember—it is important for you to be familiar with your child's academic workout, so that you can check on his or her progress along the way.



# Getting academically fit for the future

*Achieving academic fitness* is the single most important thing your child can do to prepare for a successful future. Statistics show that the more academically fit your child is, the more options he or she will have. Whether your child grows up to be a surgeon, computer technician, teacher or an airplane mechanic, learning never stops. Your child will be expected to apply a high level of skills and knowledge on the job. And there will always be a more demanding computer application, a new invention or a more complex project awaiting your child in tomorrow's workplace and civic life. That's why you need to get your child in top academic shape today.



## Working It Out: Brains vs. Brawn

Profession	Skills for Success on the Job
An assembler in a successful manufacturing company	Helps select manufacturing company equipment, uses statistical process analysis, helps make hiring and training decisions, and works to ensure customer satisfaction
A car mechanic	Knows how fuel characteristics affect combustion, uses formulas such as Ohm's Law to solve circuit parameter calculations, and communicates effectively with customers to determine causes of problems and possible solutions
A doctor	Operates laser technology, draws on knowledge of advanced computing and molecular genetics, and communicates well with patients, both verbally and in writing
A salesclerk	Uses correct grammar, has good oral and written communication skills, uses computer keyboards and workstations, understands data-entry techniques, and has familiarity with word-processing and spreadsheet software



Students know...  
"When you expect more,  
we learn more."

The future of our world lies in the minds of our children. And although higher academic standards are challenging, this challenge is actually welcomed by students. Students know that higher expectations lead to greater rewards—and they're prepared to work harder to get in top academic shape.

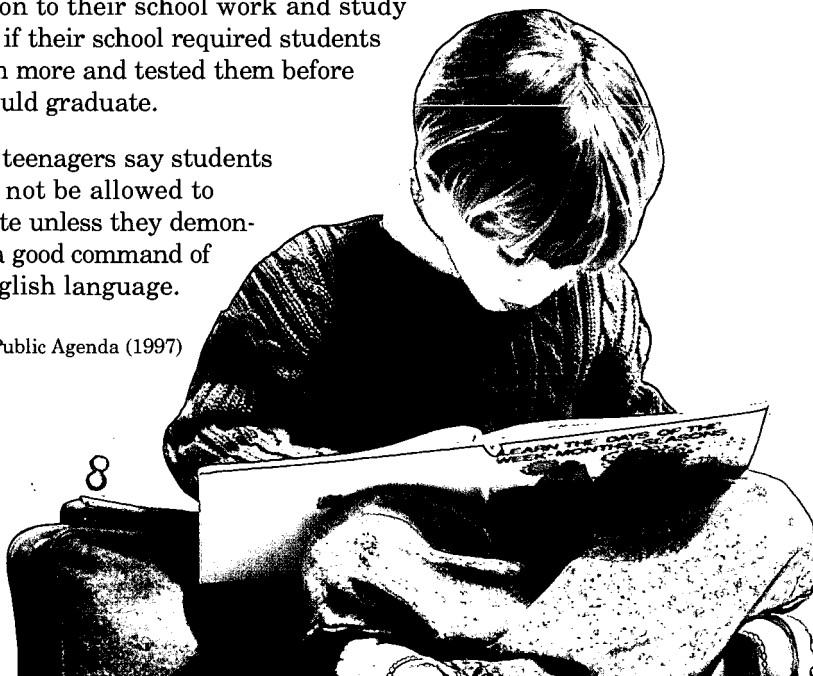
## "an academic fact"

74% of teenagers say schools should only pass students to the next grade when they have learned what is expected of them.

75% of teenagers indicate they would pay more attention to their school work and study harder if their school required students to learn more and tested them before they could graduate.

76% of teenagers say students should not be allowed to graduate unless they demonstrate a good command of the English language.

Source: Public Agenda (1997)







# Measuring your child's academic strength

What follows is a sampling of academic work from schools where high standards are already in place. Spend some time with your child and see how well he or she measures up. Then compare these examples to what your child is currently working on in school. This exercise will give you a good idea of how the standards in your child's school are measuring up.



## 2nd Grade Writing and English

*Your child will be able to:*

- Use a dictionary to find meanings of words.
- Make a personal dictionary or word list to use when writing.
- Alphabetize words to the third letter.
- Read a non-fiction book and relate its contents.
- Identify the setting of a story on a map or globe.
- Identify, locate and utilize the table of contents and glossary of a book.
- Use the table of contents to locate specific book chapters and predict the book's contents.

Source: Beaufort County School District (South Carolina)



## 4th Grade Reading

*At the basic level, your child will be able to read the following passage from "Charlotte's Web" and then relate what Charlotte promised Wilbur.*

*At the proficient level, your child will be able to describe why Charlotte thought she could fool Zuckerman.*

"Having promised Wilbur that she would save his life, she was determined to keep her promise. Charlotte was naturally patient. She knew from experience that if she waited long enough, a fly would come to her web; and she felt sure that if she thought long enough about Wilbur's problem, an idea would come to mind. Finally, one morning toward the middle of July, the idea came. 'Why how perfectly simple!' she said to herself. 'The way to save Wilbur's life is to play a trick on Zuckerman. If I can fool a bug,' thought Charlotte, 'I can surely fool a man. People are not as smart as bugs.'"

Source: U.S. Department of Education, passage/excerpt used by permission from HarperCollins Publishers



## 7th Grade Math

*Your child will be able to complete the following:*

The table below gives the record for Joan Dyer's last 100 times at bat. She is now coming up to bat again. Use the data below to answer the following questions:

1. What is the probability that Joan will hit a home run?
2. What is the probability that she will get a hit?
3. How many times can she be expected to walk in her next 14 times at bat?  
Explain your answer.

Home runs	9
Triples	2
Doubles	16
Singles	24
Walks	11
Outs	38
Total	100

Source: National Council of Teachers of Mathematics

## 8th Grade History

*Your child will be able to:*

Demonstrate an understanding of the underlying principles of the American Revolution.

Describe major events and explain ideas leading up to the American Revolution, the contributions of Washington, Jefferson, Franklin and others in establishing a new nation, the importance of the Declaration of Independence, and how the principles which brought about the American Revolution influenced other nations then and now.

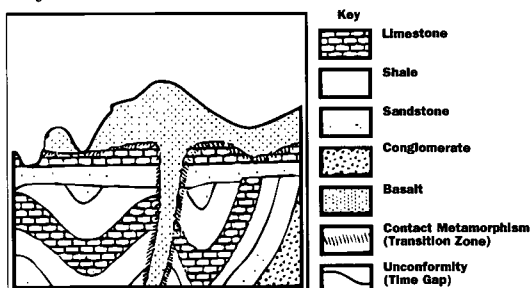
Source: California Department of Education

## High School Science

*Your child will be able to answer the following:*

The diagram below represents a cross section of a portion of the Earth's crust. The rock layers haven't been overturned. Which formation is oldest? Explain your answer.

- a. Basalt
- b. Sandstone
- c. Shale
- d. Conglomerate



Source: Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS)

## High School English

*Your child will be able to:*

Identify the antonym for the following.

### 1. NEMESIS

- a. foe
- b. enemy
- c. colleague
- d. savior
- e. pathos

Choose a related pair of words that best expresses a relationship similar to that in the original pair of words.

### 2. WILDERNESS : CAMPING

- a. car : driving
- b. library : reading
- c. tent : backpack
- d. horse : riding
- e. walking : sidewalk



## International Test Questions

The eighth grade results from the Third International Math & Science Study (TIMSS) were released in 1996. Out of 41 nations, U.S. eighth graders scored below the international average in math, and above the international average in science. What follows are two test questions from the TIMSS exam.



## 8th Grade Math

The table shows the values of  $x$  and  $y$ , where  $x$  is proportional to  $y$ . What are the values of  $P$  and  $Q$

- a.  $P=14$  and  $Q=31$
- b.  $P=10$  and  $Q=14$
- c.  $P=10$  and  $Q=31$
- d.  $P=14$  and  $Q=15$
- e.  $P=15$  and  $Q=14$

$x$	3	6	$P$
$y$	7	$Q$	35

Source: Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)



## 8th Grade Science

A flashlight close to a wall produces a small circle of light compared to the circle it makes when the flashlight is far from the wall. Does more light reach the wall when the flashlight is farther away? Explain your answer.

\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_ No

Source: TIMSS

Answers:

7th Grade Math: 1) .09 or 9%    2) .51 or 51%    3) 1.54 or once or twice

High School Science: d

High School English: c, b

International Test Questions

8th Grade Math: e

8th Grade Science: No

# Healthy talks with teachers

Creating a regular dialogue between you and your child's teachers is a crucial part of his or her academic success. Teachers need your involvement, which will help your child master the skills and knowledge needed to become academically fit.

This school year, talk with your child's teachers and administrators about higher academic standards. Ask questions at parent meetings, school board meetings or school site council meetings; or call to arrange a convenient time to talk. Make sure teachers know how important you think higher academic standards are to your child's education. But understand that while teachers can answer questions about the academic expectations in your child's classroom, teachers do not set academic standards. In most cases, academic standards are established by the state or local school district, with the participation of educators and community members.

The more involved you are in your child's education, the more successful schools will be in helping him or her learn the necessary skills and knowledge.

The following are questions to ask your child's teachers, parent-teacher organizations and administrators about higher academic standards. The answers will help you gauge your child's academic progress and his or her school's progress in achieving higher academic standards.

## 5 categories of questions to ask your child's school

### 1. What skills and knowledge will my child be expected to master this year?

- What is my child expected to learn this year in key subjects like math, science, history and English?
- Are there challenging academic standards in place at this school, and how do they compare with other school districts? May I see them?
- How do teachers inform students about the academic standards they're expected to meet?
- What kind of projects and assignments are in place to help my child meet higher academic standards?

### 2. How will my child be evaluated?

- What kind of information do teachers use to evaluate students, their learning and whether they're academically ready to move on to the next grade?
- How are grades determined in your classroom?

### 3. What can I do to stay more involved in my child's academic progress?

- What can I do at home to complement what is happening in the classroom?

- How can I know on a daily basis what homework has been assigned?

- How can I support teachers' efforts in implementing higher academic standards?

### 4. How do you accommodate differences in learning?

- What if my child is a slow learner and falls behind, or is a fast learner and is bored?
- Are summer school, tutoring or other programs available for students who need more help?

### 5. How are students prepared for further learning after high school?

- What learning opportunities exist outside the classroom to make learning more relevant to what happens in the real world?
- Are children encouraged to think about a wide variety of career interests?
- Are all students encouraged to take algebra by the end of 8th grade?

### Some additional questions to ask if your child is in high school:

- Are all students encouraged to take rigorous courses that give them the option to go on to post-secondary education?
- What Advanced Placement (AP) classes are available, and what percentage of students take them?
- Does my child have to pass a test to graduate from high school? What grade does the test measure?



# Basic home workouts for you and your child

Academic standards are organized around key subjects. By reinforcing learning at school with learning at home, you can do a great deal to ensure that your child meets higher academic standards. The following are suggested activities you can do at home, beginning in the early grades, to help your child.

## Reading / Writing

- Encourage reading for other purposes beyond school. At the breakfast table, help your child read the cereal box, or, on the road, have your child read signs.
- Encourage your child to read at least 30 minutes a day, especially in the summer when children often lose ground in reading skills.
- On holidays, help your child make cards and write greetings to friends and relatives. (On vacations, encourage him or her to keep a journal.

## Math

- At the grocery store, involve your child in tracking down bargains and comparing prices. At a baseball game, teach him or her about the math of batting averages and other statistics. If you're building something at home or wrapping presents, involve your child in figuring out how to calculate the amount of material needed.
- Ask a young child to name the geometric shapes of cans, boxes, pizzas and books. Ask an older child to calculate how much milk your family consumes day or per week.

## History / Geography / Civics

- Use your family's history to help your child write about or record family stories to understand how history connects us with the past.
- Encourage your child's natural interest in geography at home by buying a puzzle of the United States, and by having your child follow your route on a map when you travel.
- On election day, take your child to vote with you.

## Science

- Encourage your child's curiosity about the natural world. If you take your child to visit a pond, for instance, you can observe and record how many different kinds of plants and animals live there.
- Ask your child to observe and describe changes in water when it boils, melts, evaporates, freezes or condenses.

## Arts

- Encourage your child to participate in local music, art and museum programs, and write about or make a presentation about the experience for family and friends.

# Exercise your mind...find out more about higher academic standards

As a parent, you may find the amount of information on academic standards overwhelming. Keep in mind, by inquiring about academic standards you're helping your child get in academic shape for the future. Information on academic standards is available from many local, state and national groups on a wide range of subjects, such as: arts, civics, English, economics, foreign languages, geography, health, history, mathematics, physical education, science and social studies.

If a copy of academic standards is not available from your local school district, contact your state department of education to request information on the state's academic expectations.

If you find that your school isn't expecting a high level of work from your child, find out if efforts to raise standards are underway in your school district or state. In many places, higher academic standards and new tests are now under development. Talk with your state and local elected officials and write to your governor to let them know you support higher academic standards for your child.

*Some of the best sources on academic standards developed by states and national groups are on the Internet. Most public libraries can help you access the following Web sites:*

Eisenhower National Clearinghouse's "Standards and Frameworks"	<a href="http://www.enc.org">www.enc.org</a>
Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL)	<a href="http://www.mcrel.org">www.mcrel.org</a>
Putnam Valley Schools	<a href="http://www.putwest.boces.org/standards.html">www.putwest.boces.org/standards.html</a>

*Contact the organizations below for more information on academic standards:*

U.S. Department of Education  
600 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202  
800.USA.LEARN  
800.872.5327  
[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)

Council of Chief State School  
Officers  
1 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.408.5505  
[www.ccsso.org](http://www.ccsso.org)

National Governors' Association  
Hall of States  
444 North Capitol Street, NW  
Suite 267  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.624.5300  
[www.nga.org](http://www.nga.org)

Achieve  
1280 Massachusetts Avenue  
Suite 410  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
617.496.6300  
[www.achieve.org](http://www.achieve.org)

National Alliance of Business  
1201 New York Avenue, NW  
Suite 700  
Washington, DC 20005  
800.787.2848  
[www.bcer.org/www.nab.com](http://www.bcer.org/www.nab.com)

U.S. Chamber of Commerce  
Center for Workforce  
Preparation  
1615 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20062  
202.463.5525

American Federation of Teachers  
555 New Jersey Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20001  
202.393.5676  
[www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)

National Education Association  
1201 16th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202.833.4000  
[www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)

The Business Roundtable  
1615 L Street, NW  
Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20036  
[www.brtable.org](http://www.brtable.org)

National Education Goals Panel  
1255 22nd Street, NW  
Suite 502  
Washington, DC 20037  
202.632.0952  
[www.negp.gov](http://www.negp.gov)





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